ASIFA EAST

The International Animated Film Society

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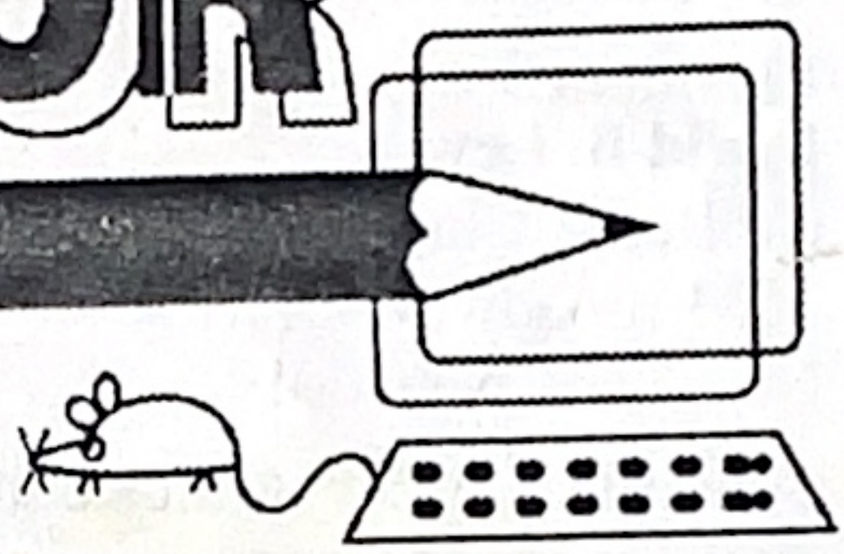

December 2002 Issue

ASIFA EAST DECEMBER Event:

* Pitch workshop with Jim Arnoff

Tuesday December 17th,
7 PM
SVA
209 E 23rd St. (btwn 2nd & 3rd Ave)
Room 502 (fifth floor)

An Evening with Tissa David, Master Animator

Saturday, January 18, 2003 - 7:30 p.m.
MoMA at the Gramercy Theatre
127 East 23 Street
(at lexington Ave.)

Also in this issue...

* **Michael Sporn** on feature length animation

* Festival Report by **Bill Plympton**

* Part II of the Making of Raggedy Ann and Andy by **Richard Gorey, Jr.**

* **Howard Beckerman's "At Home With Mickey & Minnie'**

* Handy Asifa-east renewal/ join form

* and much, much more!

ASIFA East

The International Animated Film Society Northeast /New York Chapter

A Program of the New York Foundation For The Arts

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT DAVID B. LEVY

So much of what seems to define a smash media hit, these days, seems to be about bridging the gap between what kids and adults want. When it comes to cartoons, one could argue that both groups want to laugh. Sure, there are sub-genres like the pre-teen girl appeal of the Wild Thornberries, but the true (and rare) billion dollar grand slams of today's TV animation are The Power Puff Girls, The Simpsons, South Park, and SpongeBob SquarePants. These are shows watched by kids and adults alike. Each of these shows put humor and entertainment value above all else.

Its hard to believe that shows are launched and paid for by networks with the expectation that they will be canceled after airing four episodes. Isn't everyone trying to have the next SpongeBob? The problem for the networks is that before SpongeBob was a phenomenon, it was just a pitch about an underwater kitchen sponge. It didn't automatically ring out (or should I say "wring out") as a cross generational hit, did it? Well, maybe it did. You see, the characters were appealing and the creator had a unique POV and great sense of humor. Perhaps even more important, the characters were well established and had heart. My guess is that a lot of failed animated TV pilots and series bombed when they didn't balance edgy humor and wacky characters with heart. Heart is a common ingredient on the big four list above. Yes, even those foul-mouthed frozen tots of South Park have heart. Come to think of it, so did earlier ground-breaking shows like Beavis and Butthead and Ren & Stimpy. On the surface, it looked like Ren & Stimpy was a show about farts. But, look deeper and you'll see that Stimpy loved his fart and missed it terribly when it went away. That's the heart in the fart. Beavis and Butthead's heart lay in their appeal as loser-outcasts. Their friendship, bizarre as it was, grounded the stupidity on the surface.

I'm willing to wager (any takers out there?) that these quantifiable qualities are what makes a child of 3 and an adult of 65 appreciate these shows. That's how one can make a show for kids (as in the case of Power Puff Girls and SpongeBob) and have it explode out to epic proportions. Remember, adults are not supposed to buy millions of children's books for themselves to read, but that's what happened in the case of Harry Potter. The box office take for the Potter films would not have set records without single adults buying tickets to this so called children's or family film. The secret to Harry's success may not be magic at all.... it may have to do with the fact that J.K. Rowling's stories feature solid, appealing, entertaining characters with heart. Who said these were cynical times?

At Home With Mickey and Minnie

(a sneak peek at our January ASIFA-East event- date, time and location TBA)

This program is not about Disney, though it incorporates films from Disney and other 20th Century American cartoon studios. It's actually a jaunt through the 1900s up till the dawn of the millennium, as seen through the décor and objects that comforted us in our homes in those years. Fashion magazines and advertisements are not always a good way to find out how people in the past actually lived. The rich and famous, such as kings, oil barons, movie stars, presidents, and other celebrities were only too glad to have the Better Homes & Gardens photographer spend a day lighting and posing them among their expensively appointed knickknacks. This is not about them, but about the everyday folks who were never photographed in their homes, and who never expected to be. Their simple domestic surroundings were revealed, not on the society pages but in the reflections of popular comic strips, magazine story illustrations, and animated cartoons of the past 100 years. Find out about what it was in a popular cartoon series of the 1930s that made me realize how animation is more revealing about reality and who we are, beyond what appears even in the history books

Howard Beckerman.

Spirit Me Away

by Michael Sporn

Christmas is here, and animated features are upon us.

TREASURE PLANET opened the same day as Adam Sandler's EIGHT CRAZY NIGHTS. Both of these are 2D features, though 3D appears in many advertised scenes. Maybe these films are good, but the ads and reviews aren't encouraging. The stories don't excite me. The timing of the animation – based on the scenes in the ads – isn't promising; there just seems to be a lot of busyness. In fact, the Adam Sandler film reminds me of the old Jerry Lewis comic books or the Filmation animated GILLIGAN'S ISLAND. Certainly, I'll see both films and hope to be pleasantly surprised.

However, recently, SPIRITED AWAY crossed over New York like a ghost in the night with absolutely glorious reviews and modest box office returns. Yet, this was the best animated feature I'd seen since PRINCESS MONONOKE. The story was complex and rich, the animation was superb, the timing was brilliant, the design was delightful, and it was enormously original and creative. To me, the element that this film had that all others lacked is what I call a "spirituality". By this I don't mean the religious proselytizing that goes on in VEGGIE TALES but a deeply inbred sense of morality hovering over every scene and every animated drawing. The history of animation has been spotted with a number of such films:
The early Disney films, particularly BAMBI and SNOW WHITE, have this spirituality; Caroline Leaf's THE STREET has it; some of the Hubley films have it; anything done by Yuri Norstein has it; Michael Dudok de Wit's FATHER AND DAUGHTER and Paul Fierlinger's STILL LIFE WITH DOGS have it.

These films all display a keen sense of morality. There's a humanity about them, a definite love and respect for all the world and all of its inhabitants (plant to animal, insect to human). I think it's a trait all great works of art have. The thing that makes you stop in front of the Klee painting or the Rodin sculpture. It's a life force that comes across loud and clear without much explanation. The author's vision is so connected to the world and our own worlds that we cannot help but be touched. The magic isn't in the ones or the twos or the fives that the animator draws but the personal vision.

Craft helps. Those born with the ability to connect in this deep and artistic way, obviously, also have to have mastered their medium and use it as the tool to get through to the viewer. There are too many people making movies that don't know what they're doing; never mind under-trained animators trying to animate. (When in doubt, add more drawings!) It's interesting that Adam Sandler wanted to make an animated film. At least he went for 2D. Now Michael Moore (BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE) wants to direct his first animated feature. His film will be 3D cgi. Who knows what star will be next; perhaps Jerry Lewis can revive his youthful incarnation via cartoon.

Spirituality is the primary ingredient in Miyazaki's work, and he seems to be one of the last animators to have it. Movies should be about the world, all art should be about the world. His movies are. I hope all of the animation lovers out there have seen his film; if not make sure you do – it's still playing and will be in video/DVD before you know it.

Report From Tenerife

- by Bill Plympton

FESTIVALS

As my plane from Madrid circled over the Tenerife Airport, my thoughts drifted to the massive death of almost 600 people, burnt to cinders.

This is the spot where two 747 Jumbo Jets collided in 1977, causing the largest air fatality ever - I heard that one Dutch woman survived and went crazy later. But I wasn't here for my own amusement - I was here for the 1st Annual Tenerife International Animation Festival.

I was whisked from the airport to downtown Santa Cruz, to the Hotel Mencey, on the Rampla de Generalissimo Franco, one of the most beautiful hotels I've ever seen. There's caviar for breakfast, and the turtles there have their own swimming pool.

Jose Luis Feito, the director of the festival, has put together a wonderful program of shorts and features from all over the world, with a decided emphasis on Spanish and Latino films - in fact, I've never seen a program of so many Spanish feature films. One of the highlights was "El Bosque Animado", or "The Living Forest", a wonderful environmental story told in 3D computer animation.

In between the films, I had time to explore this beautiful island, one of seven in the Canary Archipelago - we drove up to the volcano, El Teide, (the highest in all of Spain) to find an exquisite plateau, unlike any scenery I've seen anywhere - and the water was so clean and inviting, I had a problem attending all the great films.

The festival invited me to do a retrospective of my work, plus show my feature "Mutant Aliens". The crowd filled the charming deco cinema, and was totally enthusiastic throughout the whole 3 hour program - afterwards I was mobbed by fans. I tell you, there is nothing like a Spanish cinema audience.

Of course, the tourist industry is dominant but the people there want to put more emphasis on culture. In fact, they've just completed a magnificent new Arts Center which will be the site of next year's festival.

I believe the first edition of the Tenerife International Animation Festival is off to a super start. And if you're looking for an animation festival with great audiences, great prize money and terrific food in a tropical paradise, this festival is for you.

Bill Plympton on location.

EVENTS

An evening with Bill Plympton

Tuesday December 10, 2002
7:00
Parsons School of Design
66 Fifth Avenue
FREE!
hosted by Richard O'Connor, Head of Production, The Ink Tank

A screening of the animation auteur's work past and present. Including excerpts from his current feature release "Mutant Aliens" and never before seen works-in-progress.

R. O. Blechman, "Illustrations to Moving Images"

Parsons School of Design
66 Fifth Avenue
January 14, 2003
7:00

a rare evening with the creative force behind several graphic novels, hundreds of commercials and short films and thousands of illustrations and its FREE!

The Ink Tank at the MoMA

The Museum of Modern Arts' Gramercy Theatre
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2 Shows (times TBD)
evening show will feature L'Histoire du Soldat with live orchestral accompaniment

THE FIRST LATVIAN INTERNATIONAL ANIMATED FILM FESTIVAL

"BIMINI 2003"

Cultural fund «ZEVS» is proud to offer you an opportunity to take part in the First Latvian International Animated Art Film Festival «BIMINI 2003».

The project is managed by the non-profit organization "Cultural Fund "Zevs". The founders of the organization are professionals with many years of experience in production of several great and successful mass events.

We wholeheartedly believe, that despite the recent heightened attention to all forms of contemporary art in the region of the Baltics (including the famous "Arsenals" Film Festival), animated art has been rather neglected by the productions companies and non-profit organizations in the Baltics.

However, the ever growing fascination with the media among both professionals and non-professionals in the Baltics led to the establishment of the Latvian International Animated Art Film Festival "BIMINI 2003".

The cultural level and geographical position of Latvia are perfectly suited for holding different festivals and cultural events. Animation as an art form is equally interesting to all age groups and to all social layers. The Animated Film Festival is doubtless to widen the level of education of the up and coming animators in our country, as well as to motivate faster integration of the local animated art into the international scene.

One of the most important aims of the Festival is to educate the non-professionals, expanding their interest in art into the new forms and to show off the achievements of the media that is truly desired and loved by all of us, but until now mostly neglected in the Baltic region.

Please read the attached rules and regulations to find out which works can be submitted and the rules for submission.

We hope that you will find our project interesting and will take part in our Festival. Should you have any questions regarding the participation, the organization or regulations, please contact us (contact information is listed at the bottom of the title page).

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LV-1010, Riga
Latvia

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Fax: +371 724 05 70
e-mail: zevs@apollo.lv

AN EVENING WITH TISSA DAVID, MASTER ANIMATOR

January 18, 2003
Saturday, January 18, 2003 - 7:30 p.m.
MoMA at the Gramercy Theatre
127 East 23 Street (at lexington Ave.)

In a career that spans more than sixty years, animator Tissa David has brought to life characters as diverse as Mr. Magoo, Shakespeare's Titania, and Raggedy Ann. She broke through the male-dominated animation industry by becoming only the second woman (after Lotte Reiniger) to direct an animated feature, Bonjour Paris, in 1953. Born in a small Transylvanian town in 1921, David attended the Academy of Beaux Arts in Budapest, where she also co-owned an animation studio. She escaped the Communist takeover of Hungary by moving to Paris in 1950, and then to the United States in 1955. Collaborating over the years with such formidable animators as Grim Natwick, John and Faith Hubley, Richard Williams, Michael Sporn, and R.O. Blechman, David established a distinctive style that is quickly recognizable yet not easily imitated. Her sensual line, economical motion, and emotional acting has graced numerous television commercials, specials, shorts and features—everything from AT+T spots to Sesame Street—many of which will be shown in full or excerpted this evening. Tissa David will also discuss her life and career with the animation historian and filmmaker John Canemaker.

Organized by Joshua Siegel, Assistant Curator, Department of Film and Media, The Museum of Modern Art, and John Canemaker, author of The Art and Flair of Mary Blair (Disney Editions, Fall 2003). Special thanks to Emily Hubley; Michael Sporn; R.O. Blechman; Michael Schlesinger, Columbia Pictures Repertory; Jerry Beck; and Italtoons for their support and loan of prints.

Join us as David discusses her work with co-curator John Canemaker. Illustrated with clips from Bonjour Paris. 1953. France. Directed by Jean Image; Terror Faces Magoo. 1959. USA; Eggs. 1970. Directed by John Hubley; Raggedy Ann & Andy: A Musical Adventure. 1977. USA. Directed by Richard Williams; and numerous television commercials and Sesame Street segments.

A
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DU FILM D' ANIMATION

The International Animated Film Society

International membership $55/yr

Formed in 1960 by an international group of animators to coordinate and further their wide visibility of the animated film. Professionals and fans from more than 50 countries sponsor animation festivals in Annecy, Ottowa and Hiroshima.

International members get:

- a one year subscription to ASIFA News, ASIFA International's official publication
- Opportunity to vote, in person or by proxy, on issues and candidates for the ASIFA Board of Directors, at meetings held at every ASIFA-sponsored animation festival
- Notification of international animation festivals and discounts on admission to international festivals
- All local membership benefits are included

Form design by Mark Segall

Time to JOIN ASIFA

R.O. Blechman/Ed Smith

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Memberships are dated from either January or June.

☐ January member

To be entered on the January list send payments between December 1st and January 15th.

☐ June member

To be entered on the June list send payments between May 1st and June 30th.

Note: As there are no July or August screenings, June membership privileges start in September.

Howard Beckerman

The eastern U.S. chapter (New York City)

Local membership $35/yr

ASIFA-East members get:

- free admission to monthly to judge the US's only annual animation festival, a showcase for the most interesting independent and commercial animation being produced today.
- The **Anymator,** a monthly newsletter which spotlights members' accomplishments and general industry news, lists jobs, grants and residencies, and includes dates and deadlines for film and video festivals worldwide.
- Invitations to special screenings and animation-related events

Questions?

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ila Abramson

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Valley of the Dolls:The making of Raggedy Ann and Andy

Part II by Rich Gorey

In the last ASIFA newsletter, I spoke briefly about the plans and expectations for the animated feature Raggedy Ann and Andy. Producers Richard Horner and Lester Osterman had entered into a partnership with composer Joe Raposo and animator Richard Williams, in New York, to create the cartoon musical. This partnership came after a meeting with artists Joe Oriolo, Aurelius Battaglia, Preston Blair, and Martin and Alice Provinson, which convinced the producers not to attempt a Disney-like approach to the material.

Howard Beckerman, a New York animator who was peripherally involved at these early stages, recalls the energetic Williams jetting back and forth from New York to London, where he had his own studio, to oversee the almost overwhelming production of Raggedy Ann. "I don't know how he did it," Beckerman says. "I didn't see how anyone could do it!"

Well, no one could. And to his credit, Williams himself knew this. He had at first refused the daunting commission, citing the film's massive scope, and the lack of appropriate studio space in New York. But in many ways, Williams was the man for the job. His enthusiasm for animation- and his energy- were infectious. Animator Michael Sporn, who worked on Raggedy Ann, recalls how Williams impressed the producers in his first meeting with them. Animator . Tissa David had animated about a hundred and fifty feet of Annie to a pre-recorded track. These pencil drawings were shot and the reel run for the producers: it was a piece of their project, come to life.Here it was: a director who had a stellar reputation, a musical score the producers understood and were comfortable with, and a charming sequence that looked as if it stepped right out of the film itself: Osterman and Horner were sold. And why shouldn't they have been?
It's clear Williams never bullied his way into the production of Raggedy Ann, or unfairly schemed to push the other contenders aside. He never even wanted sole responsibility for the mammoth project, which he knew would be more than a full time job. Some people involved recall the decision to have veteran Abe Levitow (Gay Purr-ee) direct, with Williams as supervising animator, but when Levitow was diagnosed with cancer, this never materialized. Levitow had been an animator on Williams' version of A Christmas Carol, so it's possible this suggestion came from Williams himself.
Canemaker's book tells of how Williams- though enthusiastic- had originally warned the producers against the scope of the project. "We are trying to outdo Disney in their own backyard," he told them. "The ground is littered with the corpses of producers who tried to take Disney on his own turf." Soon, Williams would be among them.

Without the assistance of Levitow- and without the backing of a major studio- Williams was literally on his own- with two producers who knew little-if anything- about animation. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that the quality of Raggedy Ann would suffer. Williams should be given tremendous credit for even attempting to do the impossible.This Herculean task soon took its toll on the director's health, his temper, and his judgement. Despite Williams' considerable talent and leadership .qualities, some of his own decisions affected the film negatively. He engaged Cornelius (Corny) Cole, the respected illustrator of children's books, to storyboard the film. Cole had been working and designing for animated films for two decades, and his elegant, intricate style was a match for Williams' classical visual sensibilities. Williams had been a fan of Cole's work, and he insisted on Cole in the early stages of production. Cole's drawings are truly splendid, but- according to Canemaker- some of his sketches arrived a full months later than the projected deadline. Such a delay may have been costly. Michael Sporn doesn't recall any of Cole's work coming in late, however, and suggests what actually did arrive after long delays were storyboards based on Cole's intricate sketches. Others remember that late into production, Cole's inspirational sketches were being used as continuity sketches for animation, (not standard practice) and the misinterpretation of these drawings resulted in weeks of unnecessary work.

Emery Hawkins animation of the grotesque Greedy (a living pudding) is perhaps the film's animation highlight, and was a sequence Williams was especially fond of. But Hawkins' work proceeded at a terribly slow pace. "They [Hawkins assistants] were in love with his drawings," Michael Sporn, one of the film's animators, observes. Perhaps rightly so, but Sporn feels this may be why so few of these drawings were streamlined or simplified. In the end, the massive, elaborate, and tremendously labor-intensive sequence was cut by a full third. A staggering amount of work had been created, that was never used. The same is true for several other sequences, which in the finished film show signs of extensive tampering. Most animators know the folly of cutting an animated film as one would a live action project.

Deleted scenes are enormously costly in animation: why weren't these cuts implemented during storyboarding? There's mention in the film's history of several Leica reels (rough tests for continuity and flow). Weren't the movie's tremendous story flaws apparent in this stage- especially to someone as versed in the process as Williams undoubtedly was? One answer may lie in the touchy situation regarding the movie's screenplay.

Pat Thackeray's story, culled from events in the original Gruelle books, was problematical, to say the least. Williams and the rest of the animation staff knew this, but were powerless to work around these limitations. Explicit instructions were relayed to Joe Oriolo (one of the early collaborators) not to tamper in any way with the screenplay- or with the score, which was being guarded with leonine ferocity by Joe Raposo. It's obvious from the film's history that these restrictive edicts went to Williams as well: several artists and animators recall such restraints. With his hands tied in this way, the director had no choice but to deliver the film exactly as written. Though in print at the time Williams was complimentary of the script for the film, years later he was frankly critical of it (with good reason).

Did the screenwriter's status as daughter of producer Lester Osterman preclude any of the animators and artists from offering their opinions, or from enhancing the original treatment? Did they fear recriminations, if they suggested changes? They had to look no further for their answer than to the disastrous reception afforded Joe Oriolo and Preston Blair's team, who'd attempted just that. They were unceremoniously- some would say rudely- dismissed by Raposo.

Even those who admire Richard Williams (and there are plenty of them) will admit that his strength was as an animator, and not a story man. "He is a great animator, an animator's animator," Michael Sporn says, "and he assumed that if the film was polished and visually impressive, that the weaknesses in the story wouldn't matter as much to people." Howard Beckerman agrees: "He (Williams) thought that he could fix the film by making it look pretty and dazzling. It is dazzling- there are some incredible things in it, but it lacks charm, which is so important to these things." Sporn, animator Tissa David, and others involved knew this surface gloss just wasn't enough to rescue the film from failure. From their vantage points in the trenches, they watched as Williams exhausted himself, trying to attend to the overwhelming details of the production- everything from attaining the Panavision lenses (which didn't arrive until very late into the game) to finding the right brand of cel and toner for the xerography process.

"Any quality in the finished film- any artistry and value in the finished film- is due directly to Williams' involvement in it," Sporn asserts- an opinion shared by many who worked on the movie. Without him, Williams' supporters say, the film would have looked like a Saturday morning cartoon of the era: cheap, shoddy, and sloppy. Delivered in this slipshod fashion, it might have been created on budget, but would have been an artistic failure as well as a commercial one.

I agree with Williams' supporters, but I wonder whether someone at the top should have given the director more of a hand, when and where he needed it. Having enticed Williams to take on the massive project, the producers seem to have left him without the tools and the staff necessary to deliver the finished product. Did they really think he could perform magic on the score and script, and fix what was wrong from the beginning? Did they really expect him to do this while jockeying between three coasts? Someone with twice the energy and resources of Williams couldn't have spun gold from the straw with which he was provided. Still, as director, he must have been at least partly responsible for maintaining the film's budget, which reportedly ballooned from 1.5 million to nearly 4.5 million, by the time the film was completed. Williams was watching the artists- and the animation- very carefully, and the film benefited from his sensitivity and talent, but who was watching the store?

As Raggedy Ann and Andy neared the halfway mark, early indications suggested big trouble. The wandering, episodic film clocked in at a tiresome 105 minutes, and worried producer Horner decided this was twenty minutes too long. Williams- at Horner's insistence- cut the film severely, but it was already too late. Millions had been spent on animation sequences that never made their way into the finished film. Experimental sequences like the dizzying staircase chase, which paid tribute to the work of cartoonist Windsor McKay, had seriously compromised the film's production schedule, and had resulted in some breathtaking- but charmless moments in the final product.

A live action prologue added to the problems. Oddly disconnected from the main story, this curiously lifeless sequence dampens the opening moments of the film. Further, Williams' choice of his own daughter to play the little girl, Marcella- was unfortunate. She's a very pretty little girl, but obviously not a professional actress. Her presence weakens what needs to be a sweet and captivating introduction to the characters. Most of the child's lines are delivered with her back to the camera: evidence of trouble or problems with either the script or the performance on the set. Overall, the framing sequences add nothing to the finished film- in fact, they take something away. There is no relationship established between the live girl and her dolls: Marcella's happiness and security is in no way connected to the adventures in which the dolls engage. Memos from producer Horner urged Williams to re-dub his daughter's voice, but the director had other things on his mind.

Faced with mounting costs, disharmony on the set, and the edicts of his producers, Willams implemented the extensive cuts suggested by Horner, but they resulted in a choppy, distracting continuity in the final version. What remained was something of a shambles. But I don't believe the film's failure should rest squarely on the director's shoulders. Indeed, as Michael Sporn, Howard Beckerman, and others say- whatever quality there is in Raggedy Ann is undoubtedly the result of Williams' passion for animation and commitment to excellence in the drawings and characters. Perhaps under more favorable circumstances, Williams might have pulled a miracle out of a hat at the last minute- but this wasn't fated to happen.

In the end, as the film neared- then passed- its projected premiere date, and the budget had tripled from its original projected figure of 1.5 million dollars, Osterman and Horner finally acted- some say too rashly. Michael Sporn remembers a meeting involving the producers, New York co-director Cosmo Anzilotti.

"They had a meeting, and decided Williams was out," Sporn says. "They asked us what we thought, and I said, 'Williams brought me onto this project. If he goes, I go.'" Sporn had already been a victim of the pressure placed on the staff. "Once, it was decided that two assistants had to be fired," he says. Essentially, these firings were engineered by the higher-ups to intimidate the remaining staff into towing the line. Sporn was "elected" to play the villain, and though he did reluctantly let the two targeted employees go, he was able to find a place for one of them in the background department, under Sue Butterworth. "So, he was fired one day and hired again the next," Sporn says. One can only imagine the effects of such pressure on the artists: it's very hard to be creative and deliver your best when such conditions prevail. Some employees left, but the tension remained- as did the Christmas deadline for completing the woe-plagued production. Facing the prospect of a mutiny from others who were also loyal to Williams, the producers offered an unhappy compromise: Williams was kept on- as an animator- and the bulk of the director's chores were given to Gerry Potterton, a veteran television animator and a friend of the director.

Canemaker's book obliquely references this tumultuous event, and mentions: "Williams's pride was stung by this move", but those involved in the production and its aftermath suggest the truth was infinitely more bitter: Williams was not even allowed onto the premises when the final product was cut together. In effect, he was barred from involvement in the final stages of a film he'd supervised for over a year of production. Those who worked in those final months recall that Williams spent his time cleaning up the animation of the other artists, and finishing the sequence where Andy sings "No Girl's Toy". It was a bad time- embarrassing for Williams, stressful for the others on the staff, and incredibly anxious for Osterman and Horner- who had seen their project go three times over-budget and pass their hoped-for Christmas release date.

Potterton- now in the director's chair, must not have liked what he saw when he viewed the work already completed. (In his defense, nobody liked what they saw: even Disney animator Frank Thomas, after seeing a completed reel, was skeptical that the finished film would entertain.) Potterton did what he could, rushed as he was, but the finished film shows signs of severe cutting, and many sequences are poorly reassembled. Things must have been brutal towards the end: an invitation to the Christmas party for the crew requests: "Bring a bottle." Jeez, Louise- couldn't someone have bought these poor animators a drink, for all their troubles? Things must have been bad. Howard Beckerman remembers that benighted Christmas party: "Everyone was standing around having drinks and trying to be cheerful, and in walks Richard Williams, with exposure sheets in his hand, calling out someone's name. He'd been up in his little cubbyhole the whole time, straining to finish things, even then."

Williams, it seems, was doomed from the start. I believe- despite his predictions to the contrary- that he knew there were problems with the original treatment, but assumed he could give the film a polish and a elegance that would overcome these flaws. Williams forte has always been character animation, not story. It's possible he just wasn't aware of the seriousness of the limitations in the film's screenplay. Further, though at the time Williams praised Joe Raposo's score, in later years he is said to have disliked the film's songs, but- like the rest of the production team- he knew better than to disagree with Raposo, or to criticize the sensitive composer's work.

One senses that Raposo, fresh from his successes in the early seventies, had assumed unofficial "ownership" of the property. It had, after all, begun as a live action Broadway theatrical production- a forum Raposo understood- and had thrived in. He admitted to rewriting the script (to his own specifications) and to shuffling scenes to support his score, which included a whopping twenty-six songs.On Broadway, this might have worked. In fact, the score seems suited to a loosely-jointed musical revue with

with several characters. There are several examples of similar successes (Raposo's own You're a Good man, Charlie Brown; A Chorus Line; Forty Second Street). But for an animated film, this "comic-opera" approach was a fatal mistake. Further complicating matters was Pat Thackeray's script, which is episodic, disjointed, and weak in terms of character motivation and suspense. It's been hinted that her status as daughter of producer Osterman may have prevented the staff from suggesting changes to her work. Many may have feared repercussions from her father- whether real or imagined. Whatever the case, nobody was ever able to challenge the decisions made by Raposo or Thackeray, much to the finished film's detriment.

Leonard Maltin calls Raggedy Ann and Andy "Slow moving, uninvolving- with endless songs by Joe Raposo that stop the action dead in its tracks." Even some of the film's participants agree. "It's a horrid film, unfortunately," says animator Tissa David, whose animation of Annie is one of the movie's strong points.

When artists are not free to express disagreement, or to offer their talent and opinions to a project that will require a year of their lives, there is bound to be trouble. Raggedy Ann and Andy, ultimately, turned out to be mainly the product of the composer and the writer (whose work was eventually rewritten by Raposo anyway). As a result, the entire film serves merely as an elaborate framework for the musical numbers, and unfortunately, they fail to deliver. "We almost can't miss, because of the soundtrack," an enthusiastic Williams said during the film's production. "All we have to do is find the original Gruelle drawings and move them around to Joe's music. I mean, how can you fail?"

Now, of course, it's clear just how. Back then, it's easy to see why Raposo's reputation and enthusiasm- and the allure of directing a feature length production- were incentives to Williams and others who lent their talents to the enterprise. And what talent! Tissa David gave what is probably the finest animation performance of her distinguished career with her animation of the rag doll Annie. Emery Hawkins' work on The Greedy is splendidly macabre: even more impressive that it was done without the assist of computers. It's the kind of surreal treat one wouldn't expect in such a film. Art Babbitt's work on the Camel with the Wrinkly knees is inspired- the kind of Golden-Age personality animation so few films showcased in the seventies. And Annie and Andy themselves are quite appealing. "I can't do Disney charm," Tissa David is quoted as saying, in Canemaker's book. "I will do my own." Did she ever. Her Annie is sweet, affectionate, ladylike, innocent, and completely charming- and with the boost given the character by the perfect voice work of actress Didi Conn, Annie is a joy to watch. Oh, if only the film could have been as warm and polished on all fronts as it is in the animation of Annie. It would have been regarded as a classic.

Williams was- and is- a master of timing and personality. There are moments in the movie that are exquisitely lovely, and animation that has a sensuous quality that's quite compelling, especially when seen on a wide screen. "I was sad that when the film was released to tape that it wasn't letterboxed," Tissa David lamented. "You had characters going in and out of the frame, and it made no sense." David feels the film's Panavision photography was one of its artistic strengths, and it's regrettable that current copies in distribution are panned and scanned, robbing viewers of the opulence of the original experience.

In its original form, Raggedy Ann and Andy is something to behold, even while its dramatics fail to engage. Some backgrounds and settings resemble the work of M.C. Escher, others recall Yellow Submarine, and there is a feeling from one scene to the next that one doesn't know quite what to expect. To some, this is a part of the film's unique artistry- to others, it's a serious flaw. Experimentation is one thing, but if it comes at the expense of cohesion and comprehension, it's another. It must be admitted, like Williams' other feature Cobbler, there are too many identifiable graphic styles fighting for attention in Raggedy Ann. The animation of the seabeast Gazooks, for instance, is much looser and rough than that of the other characters. Why? "I refuse to work that hard," animator George Bakes admitted bluntly at the time. "Too many lines doesn't strengthen a pose, and shading hides a bad drawing".

Well, okay- but what about a consistent tone and style for the film? This seems to have been overlooked in several instances. Babette (the irritating, unlikable French doll) has a sketchy, delicate look that sets her apart from the other characters in the playroom. The relative sizes of some of the characters changes from scene to scene- even the appearance of some of the toys is inconsistent (the Pirate, for instance). Several backgrounds had to be reworked after they were shot, at an added expense, because they were photographing too light in the rushes. Sue Butterworth had to go over these finished pieces with a delicate ink line, to darken the originals up. I suspect these inconsistencies were impossible to plan around- with two teams working on separate coasts, and with the rush the film was under to be completed in time for a Christmas release (which never materialized).

Further, the lack of available talent in New York meant that many untrained and unskilled inkers and cel painters were hired, and the time it took to train and supervise these novices must have cost the production some of its sheen and gloss. Art Babbitt pitched in- late into production- by teaching courses in animation and motion study for assistants on the picture. This was a wonderful, generous gesture, but it's too bad it was needed in the first place. Had the talent and the studio space been in place when production started, perhaps someone close to the top would have had the time to take a breather and address the larger problems facing the production team. Though there were many technical delays (including the acquisition of the wide screen Panavision lenses) the film's shortcomings are not necessarily visual in nature.

Even to those who admire the finished film- myself included- it's difficult to sit through Raggedy Ann and Andy in a single sitting. It's best taken in small doses, where the animation and graphics can be appreciated on their own merits. Along the way, there are many pleasant surprises, for those who are game. The film's best musical number is the charming "Song Blue" which the Camel sings in a romanticized starry setting. If the rest of the songs had been of this caliber- or of this emotional resonance- the film would have benefited tremendously from them. Sadly, none of the other songs are up to the quality of this centerpiece. Some are downright awful, as in the case of the song the Pirate sings to his parrot while chained by Babette in the hold of his own ship. I defy anyone to defend the lyrics to this song. Or, for that matter, to defend its presence at this point in the film: it contributes nothing to the development of the story or to the character of the pirate. It's discouraging that there was no one involved who felt they had the authority to restructure the film's script or score.

Though the producers had high hopes for the film, early on it was clear that Raggedy Ann would be a failure, critically and commercially. Howard Beckerman still winces when he remembers a disastrous premiere screening at the Guild 50th theater in Manhattan. "I felt awful when I saw Annie tell the others they were going after that French doll, Babette," Beckerman says. "No one liked that doll- why would they go after her? The story was doomed from there on." Later, as the film progressed, Beckerman saw children "roaming the aisles. You hardly ever see that when there's a cartoon playing. That's when we knew- there was deep trouble."

The film disappeared quickly, and the reviews were scathing. That summer, the mega-hit Disney film The Rescuers was released, erasing any memory of Raggedy Ann and Andy from the public's consciousness. Williams and his stellar crew had struggled mightily to tie their string to Osterman and Horner's kite, only to see it crash back to

earth. What might have been the first truly worthy successor to the Disney crown ended in disaster. And yet, speaking from the distance of a quarter of a century, the failure of a film can't really be called "a disaster". As Beckerman says, "Hell, it was a movie, not the Exxon Valdes." He's got a point. It's so easy to tear down the hard work of people- after the fact, and to define their talent and their contributions to the industry by that failure. Too easy, in fact.

In the final analysis, a compelling picture emerges of the making of Raggedy Ann and Andy. A somewhat familiar picture, to those well-versed in animation history. All the same elements are there: the producer with a musical fairy tale property: the director who has a vision for the piece as something elaborate, groundbreaking, and visually stunning: a team of young, eager artists, perhaps untrained, but willing to support the vision of their director: the deadlines missed, the budgets passed: the expectation of something wonderful.

Remind you of anything? To me, it's almost a repeat of the period of experimentation and discovery that surrounded the making of Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Of course, we know now that the outcome was far different, but the energy, the stress, the learning curve, and the coming together to support a common goal- these are the same. The people who made Raggedy Ann and Andy were trying to do something that – outside of Disney- hadn't been done before. They intended to make a contribution to the annals of animated filmmaking that would be- in its own way- as unique as Snow White had been, forty years before, and as much of a groundbreaker. They suffered under the same time constraints, the same pressure, and the same misguided belief that it would all be easier than it was. For all its faults, Raggedy Ann and Andy really is something different in animated movies: it unfolds like a nightmare, and like a dream, it is surreal, dark, disjointed, and sometimes frightening. Williams had a distinct way of looking at the world through animation, and his style and consciousness is evident in nearly every scene of the film. That it doesn't hold together as a whole is undeniable, but individual set pieces still impress for their ingenuity and audacity. Two major sequences are designed without backgrounds: only a stark black field appears behind the characters.

Elsewhere, the background becomes the star of the film, as in the glittering "Blue" musical number. Changes in perspective and point of view (especially in the playroom sequence) are stunning, and were engineered before the advent of computers which would have made these shots easier to handle and execute.

For me, this is the film's legacy: Raggedy Ann and Andy served as the best training ground available for young artists trying to break into the business. Michael Sporn has said, echoing the sentiments of many of his contemporaries, "Richard Williams single-handedly revived animation in the seventies. He got the world to look at animation in a completely different way. If it hadn't have been for him, you wouldn't be here speaking with me today." To me, this is an affectionate and honest tribute to Williams' genius as an animator and his ability to inspire. Through creating Raggedy Ann and Andy, Williams gave first-hand instruction in discipline, timing, taste, technique, and perspective to a whole generation of New York animators. If it's true he "single-handedly" revived animation in the seventies, he accomplished this as a teacher as well as a director. Whatever limitations the movie has as entertainment, Williams had a way of getting the best in people to come out.

What will Williams leave behind, ultimately? The memory of Raggedy Ann? His sadly truncated Thief and the Cobbler? Probably these are not the jewels in his crown he intended them to be. But there is a generation of animators who will claim his work- and his influence- as their inspiration, in much the same way that the new crop of special effects technicians owe a debt to Ray Harryhausen. Raggedy Ann and Andy was one of the few opportunities these artists and filmmakers may have had to get first hand exposure to a talent like Williams. This experience has resonated throughout the rest of their careers. The film, in retrospect, is incidental. The connection to Richard Williams- and the education inherent in the production of a feature film- were the value for these people. Wouldn't it have been nice if the finished movie had been a feather in everyone's cap, as well? Sure it would have- but it wasn't, and they moved on.

To those who worked with Williams, Raggedy Ann was a frustrating, enervating, but exhilarating ride, and the only chance in their young careers that they had to work with giants in the industry like Babbitt, Hawkins, and David. Likewise, though the production of the film was by all accounts torturous- it certainly must have served as a worthy introduction to the rigors and heartaches of the animation field. Experience is the best teacher- or so they say- and I'll bet that a year- or even six months- on Raggedy Ann was better than four years at SVA- in terms of preparing a young animator for the demands of a profession that often gives little in return. In trying to reconstruct- and deconstruct- the process by which an animated film is made, one struggles to be objective. It's true that there are many fine bits and pieces in Raggedy Ann and Andy, and that as an education in the highs and lows of industry, it must have served its purpose for the hundreds who eventually worked on it. It stands today as a document of the time it was produced- a blending of the work of some seasoned pros and the enthusiasm of a younger breed of artists. In this respect, it's somewhat like the similarly-maligned The Black Cauldron, a film which dubiously ushered in a new crop of Disney animators. It's possible much of the animation being created in New York today is the product of men and women whose first experience with professional animation was Raggedy Ann.

Maybe it's best to see the film in this light, and to appreciate it as the educational experience it was. Not all of life's lessons are happy ones. I'm sure Richard Williams would like to forget the year and a half his life was consumed by the adventures of those two damned dolls. But his enthusiasm, the scope of the project, and the film itself remain. Will it ever be regarded as a classic, or a masterpiece? Well, probably not. But whatever else it was, it was an "adventure", perhaps more so for its troubled creators than for its characters.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to persistent budget cuts, the **High School of Art and Design** is seeking donations of used materials & equipment for our cartooning/animation department. For over 60 years, our humble classrooms have nurtured such talents as **Ralph Bakshi, Howard Beckerman**, and Art Spiegelman (not to mention **Tony Bennett** & **Calvin Klein**)Though animation/cartooning is our most popular major, the lack of funding has seriously inhibited our growth. Frustrated, some teachers have been forced to build their own equipment or purchase it out of their own pockets.

Any assistance I will be much appreciated, and acknowledged with..... a prompt letter from the school itemizing the gift & value for tax purposes.

Contact: David Mulkins (mulbd@aol.com) 212-460-9887, w212-752-4340. or John Filardi (Jafbh@yahoo.com) w212-752-4340, h718-229-8025 Mail: High School of Art & Design 1075 2nd Ave. NY, NY 10022.